

# Children In The Middle

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*Program developers or their agents provided the Model Program information below.*

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Children In The Middle; Divorce Education for Parents (CIM) is a skills-based program that helps children and parents deal with the children's reactions to divorce. Divorcing parents may use their children to manipulate and/or control each other around a variety of personal, social, and financial issues. These tactics increase the stress and anxiety typically experienced by children of divorce and can increase children's risk for behavior problems, depression, delinquency, substance use, teen pregnancy, school failure and dropout, and suicide. Built around a 37-minute videotape for parents and a 30-minute videotape for children, Children In The Middle needs no special training or licensing to implement. The parent video teaches parents the skills needed to avoid putting children in the middle of their conflicts. The children's video seeks to dispel myths that children have about divorce and alleviate children's problems such as—

- Loss of concentration and attention
- Declining grades and behavior problems at school
- Withdrawal from friends
- Emotional outbursts and health problems
- Serious anger with one or both parents
- Delinquency and substance use

The parent videotape is available in Spanish or open-caption.

## PROGRAM BACKGROUND

Divorce affects more than 1.5 million children a year. The most damaging aspect of divorce for children is their parents' conflict, particularly when it involves loyalty conflicts. Children In The Middle was developed to reduce children's risk for post-divorce maladjustment by reducing the loyalty conflicts experienced by the children. The program was based on research that identified the most common and stressful loyalty conflicts experienced by children in divorcing relationships, conflicts of which the parents were unaware. The program's adult



component video recreates these conflict scenarios. The philosophy of the approach is that making parents aware that they place their children in loyalty binds and teaching them how to reduce their children's distress will result in changed parental behavior. The Center for Divorce Education, which publishes and distributes the program, was formed to educate judges about the need for such programs for divorcing parents.

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## **RECOGNITION**

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Model Program

Children's Rights Council: Positive Parenting Award

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## **IOM CLASSIFICATION**

### **SELECTIVE**

This program was developed for children whose parents who are experiencing divorce, the divorcing parents, or children and adults who have completed the divorce process but are still experiencing litigation.

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## **INTERVENTION TYPE**

### **COMMUNITY-BASED**

Although this program has been implemented in community, school, and treatment locations, its design allows it to be administered by groups that are outside and inside these entities.

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## **CONTENT FOCUS**

**SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE, DOES NOT SPECIFICALLY ADDRESS ANY SUBSTANCES**

### **SOCIAL EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE**

- **Children** learn how to share unpleasant feelings about their parents' divorce and to problem-solve ways to deal with these feelings. They learn to communicate more effectively with their parents.
- **Parents** learn how to reduce conflict between themselves during a divorce so that relitigation of custody agreements is greatly reduced.
- **Parents and children** learn how to reduce the stress associated with divorce and custody and living arrangements.

### **Parents as a primary target population**

Parents are a primary target in this program, which involves a one- or two-session class with parents, using a video about children caught in the middle of parental disputes, conflicts, and loyalties. CIM is designed for use with divorcing parents in conjunction with court-mandated or -recommended training.

## **DOES NOT SPECIFICALLY ADDRESS ANY SUBSTANCES**

This program helps to reduce the risk of substance use in children by enhancing the involvement of both parents in their lives following divorce and reducing the stress associated with the divorce and separation.

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## **DELIVERY LOCATION**

This program has been implemented in community, school, and treatment locations.

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## **INTERVENTIONS BY DOMAIN**

### **INDIVIDUAL, FAMILY**

#### **INDIVIDUAL**

##### **Parent:**

- Parenting skills training
- Classroom/peer-facilitated interactive curriculum
- Life skills training/values clarification and antiviolence models

##### **Child:**

- Individual or group counseling
- Individual and/or parent-child counseling
- Curricula incorporating skill-building exercises

#### **FAMILY**

- Curricula designed to develop problem-solving and communications skills
  - Task-oriented family education sessions, including role-playing, to improve family interaction
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## **KEY PROGRAM APPROACHES/COMPONENTS**

### **INFORMATION SHARING, PARENT TRAINING, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE**

#### **INFORMATION SHARING**

CIM informs parents about the effects of divorce on children and families through videotapes and group discussion. The program tells children about the feelings and conflicts associated with divorce and how to manage them, using videotapes, discussion, and individual and/or parent-child counseling

#### **PARENT TRAINING**

- The program provides video-based training to parents on the four key problems that affect children during divorce:
- Carrying messages

- Money issues
- Putting down the other parent
- Quizzing children

The program also addresses changes in parental behavior with respect to parental conflict and relitigation practices.

## SKILL DEVELOPMENT

The program teaches children communication, conflict, and stress management/reduction skills, and how to deliver “I” messages. It addresses changes in children’s behavior with respect to self-blame, and strategies for expressing feelings.

## HOW IT WORKS

The program uses workbook exercises and videotape excerpts to address the most common scenarios that occur in families experiencing divorce. For parents, the first session includes the viewing and discussion of a video that features realistic scenes portrayed by actual families of divorce showing inappropriate and appropriate methods of handling conflict. The tape is stopped at cued discussion points to allow parents to respond to questions about how children feel when caught in loyalty binds and what they can do to resolve the conflict. Workbook exercises and role-plays give parents a chance to practice new skills. If the class meets more than once, homework is assigned from the workbook.

For children, programs may be held at school, with a mental health practitioner, or in groups at social service agencies. They may also use a video/workbook format, and are designed for children 9 to 12 years of age. The program includes a cartoon format workbook for children 3 to 9 years old. It provides children with video-based training for dealing with and expressing feelings, “I” messages, asking for help, changing thoughts and activities, and getting on with life.

Alternatively, parents and children can view the 30-minute, child-focused videotape together and complete workbook exercises at home or at a practitioner’s office, or incorporate the materials into a treatment plan.

Parents are usually mandated to attend classes held in their communities (at social service agencies, community colleges) by domestic relations courts. A group leader facilitates the adult portion of the program, which is typically delivered to a class of 12 to 20 parents. The first session includes the 37-minute “Children In The Middle” video. Narrated by a dynamic husband-and-wife team, the video features realistic scenes portrayed by actual families of divorce showing inappropriate and appropriate methods of handling conflict. The tape is stopped at cued discussion points to allow parents to respond to questions about how children feel when caught in loyalty binds and what they can do to resolve the conflict. Workbook exercises and role-plays give parents a chance to practice new skills. If the class meets more than once, homework is assigned from the workbook. One or two 90- to 120-minute class sessions are typical.

Children’s programs may be held at school, with a mental health practitioner, or in groups at social service agencies. Parents and children can view the 30-minute, child-focused video together and complete workbook exercises at home or at the practitioner’s office with guidance from the practitioner. Typically, a family counselor will incorporate the materials into a treatment plan consisting of 4 to 10 sessions over 2 to 4 months. Parents are given the *What About the Children* booklet and the *Parents and Children’s Guidebook* to study and complete exercises at home.

## IMPLEMENTATION ESSENTIALS

Parental recruitment may be voluntary or by referral from respected sources; however, greatest participation is assured when a domestic relations judge or other official source mandates it. Classes should be held in a safe location (i.e., populated, well-lit, public or private facilities, secure rooms, on-premise security services), especially when domestic violence is possible. Classes should be offered regularly and at various times, depending on community size and divorce rate, to assure prompt participation. Needed equipment includes a VCR and monitor, either a flipchart or chalkboard, and an overhead projector or other equipment to display a PowerPoint presentation.

This is a stand-alone program, and training is not required for group leaders. However, effective group leaders must have experience with divorced families, have good interpersonal skills, and be nonjudgmental. They must study the *Discussion Leader's Guide* and review all program materials.

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## OUTCOMES

### REDUCTIONS IN NEGATIVE ATTITUDES/BEHAVIORS, OTHER TYPES OF OUTCOMES

#### REDUCTIONS IN NEGATIVE ATTITUDES/BEHAVIORS

- 57 % reduction in litigation (e.g., child-access, change of custody, and/or child-support disputes)
- 30% to 53% reduction in parental conflict, particularly loyalty conflicts
- 22% reduction in child-reported stress

#### OTHER TYPES OF OUTCOMES

- Improved parental cooperation and communication
  - Increased sensitivity to children's feelings about the divorce
  - Increased child access to the nonresidential parent
  - Increased positive communication with the child about the other parent
  - 70% fewer school absences
  - 54% fewer physician visits by children
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## EVALUATION DESIGN

### METHODOLOGIES USED TO EVALUATE THE PROGRAM:

Eight evaluations of the program or its components have been conducted. Three studies used random assignment of participants to treatment and control or alternate treatment groups. These studies were conducted in court settings, schools, community agencies, and therapists' offices in small towns and large cities. More than 1,000 families were involved in these evaluations, representing a cross-section of incomes and all major ethnic groups. Details on the studies are available on the Web site: [www.divorce-education.com](http://www.divorce-education.com).

## **DELIVERY SPECIFICATIONS**

0–4 WEEKS, 5–24 WEEKS

Amount of time required to deliver the program and obtain documented outcomes:

For parents, the program can be delivered in one to two sessions of 2 to 3 hours each. The children's program consists of 6 to 10 sessions that are 30 to 45 minutes in length.

For parents and children together, the program can be delivered in 4 to 10 sessions over 2 to 4 months.

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## **INTENDED SETTING**

RURAL, URBAN, SUBURBAN

Program was developed for and is used extensively in urban, suburban, and rural settings. Program evaluations included community settings in Athens, Ohio; Jacksonville, Florida; Louisville, Kentucky; Detroit, Michigan; and Cleveland, Ohio.

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## **FIDELITY**

Components that must be included in order to achieve the same outcomes cited by the developer:

- Although parental recruitment may be voluntary or by referral from respected sources, greatest participation is assured when a domestic relations judge or other official source mandates it.
  - If possible, parents need to attend class within 30 days of filing for divorce to obtain maximum benefit.
  - Classes should be held in a safe location (i.e., populated, well-lit public or private facilities, secure rooms, on-premise security services), especially when domestic violence is possible. If possible, avoid holding classes in the courthouse.
  - Classes should be offered regularly and at various times, depending upon community size and divorce rate, to assure prompt participation.
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## **BARRIERS AND PROBLEMS**

Key barriers and problems associated with the use of this Model Program and potential solutions:

**Barrier:** It is sometimes difficult get participants to talk about their experiences and feelings during the sessions.

**Solution:** It is important to create a feeling of psychological safety among participants by keeping the class environment informal and conversational, assuring confidentiality, and giving people a safe environment to express emotions.

**Problem:** Low or no attendance and program completion.

**Solution:** Unless attendance is mandatory, the highest risk (high conflict) parents will not participate.

**Problem:** Large class sizes will decrease interaction.

**Solution:** Keep class sizes small—12 to 20 parents.

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## PERSONNEL

FULL-TIME, PART-TIME, PAID, VOLUNTEER

This program can be implemented with mental health professionals from community, clinic, and/or school settings.

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## EDUCATION

HIGH SCHOOL, UNDERGRADUATE, GRADUATE

Effective group leaders must have experience with divorced families, possess good interpersonal skills, and be nonjudgmental. They must study the *Discussion Leader's Guide* and review all program materials.

A graduate degree in a mental health field is very desirable.

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## PERSONNEL TRAINING

TYPE: SEMINAR/WORKSHOPS, LOCATION: ONSITE (OF USER), OFFSITE (AT DEVELOPER'S OR TRAINER'S LOCATION), LENGTH: BASIC

Training is not required, and the great majority of those leading divorce education classes with this program have not had training.

An 8-hour workshop is available several times per year in Arkansas and on the East Coast, and onsite at the user's location. Training of trainers is offered annually.

For training, contact:

Mimi Lupin

E-mail: [qb36@sbcbglobal.net](mailto:qb36@sbcbglobal.net)

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## COST (ESTIMATED IN U.S. DOLLARS)

\$1,000–\$5,000

Cost considerations for implementing this program as recommended by the developer:

**Budget:** Participants pay a fee to cover the program costs listed below. The fee may range from no charge (for indigent participants) to \$60.

**Salary:** . . . . . \$50 to \$80 per hour  
(group leader for two 4-hour classes)

**Room rental:** . . . . . \$0 to \$80 (local rates)

**Equipment:**

VCR, monitor: . . . . . \$400

LCD projector (optional): . . . . . \$900

Refreshments (optional): . . . . . \$20–\$40

Materials . . . . . Listed below

**Training is optional:** This is a stand-alone program, and training is not required for group leaders.

Onsite training . . . . . \$1,250  
for up to 30 people

Offsite training . . . . . \$125/person

Training materials cost \$8 per person.

**Materials costs:**

The parent education program includes:

- *Discussion Leader's Guide*
- Videotape—"Children In The Middle" (adult version)
- Set of PowerPoint slides
- Booklet *Children In The Middle: A Parent's and Children's Guidebook*, which provides skill practice
- Booklet *What About the Children: A Guide for Divorced and Divorcing Parents*, a 40-page summary of the effects of divorce on children, the impact of moderating variables, and practical advice on ways to increase their children's protective factors and reduce risk factors

The children's materials include:

- Videotape—"Children In The Middle: Children's Version"
- *Teacher's and Counselor's Manual* to guide practitioners in the use of the program in groups
- *Surviving Divorce: A Student's Companion*, a handbook with thinking and writing exercises for children 9 to 15 years of age

**Manuals** (all titles) . . . . . \$25 or less  
(reduced rates when ordered in bulk)

**Booklets** . . . . . \$3.00 or less  
(reduced rates when ordered in bulk)

**Complete Kits** (videotapes, booklets) . . . . . \$229 each

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**INTENDED AGE GROUP**

EARLY CHILDHOOD (0–4), CHILDHOOD (5–11), EARLY ADOLESCENT (12–14)

The program is designed for children 3 to 12 years of age and their parents.



## **INTENDED POPULATION**

**AFRICAN AMERICAN, ASIAN AMERICAN, HISPANIC/LATINO, WHITE**

The program has been evaluated with more than 1,000 African American, Asian American, Hispanic/Latino, and White families.

The program is one of the most widely used divorce education programs in the country. It has been used in most States, in urban, suburban, and rural settings, and since it is usually court-mandated for divorcing parents, a cross-section of ethnic populations has participated.

African American families have been program recipients at twice the rate of Hispanic/Latino and Asian families.

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## **GENDER FOCUS**

**BOTH GENDERS**

This program was developed for parents of both genders.

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## **REPLICATIONS**

Approximately 200 sites have implemented the program since initial testing. A partial list follows:

Russell Vaagen  
West Central Mental Health Center  
211 West Green Street  
Adel, IA 50003  
Phone: (515) 993-4535  
E-mail: [rvaagen@westcentralmhc.com](mailto:rvaagen@westcentralmhc.com)

Mercy Medical Center  
Mercy Psychiatric Services  
1750 48th Street, Suite 2  
Des Moines, IA 50310-1993  
Contact Person: Ask for CIM presenter  
Phone: (515) 271-6300  
Web site: [www.mercydesmoines.org](http://www.mercydesmoines.org)

Susan Christofferson  
The Nurturing Center  
146 3rd Avenue West  
Kalispell, MT 59901  
Phone: (406) 756-1414  
E-mail: [susanc@nurturingcenter.org](mailto:susanc@nurturingcenter.org)  
Web site: [www.nurturingcenter.org](http://www.nurturingcenter.org)

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Country Counseling Center  
West 19868 State Road 21  
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Darlington, WI 53530  
Phone: (608) 776-4820  
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Sarah Witthuhn  
Sunflower Family Services, Inc.  
1503 Vine Street, Suite D  
Hays, KS 67601  
Phone: (785) 625-4600  
E-mail: [sarahw@sunflower.org](mailto:sarahw@sunflower.org)  
Web site: [www.sunflowerfamily.org](http://www.sunflowerfamily.org)

## 1. BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Same as original implementation.

## 2. REPLICATION SETTING

Most replications are at community social service agencies that are running a divorce education course for the domestic relations court. Additional settings include: churches, hospitals, juvenile detention centers, psychologists, mediators, private practices, county extension offices, community colleges, mental health centers, and family service agencies.

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## ADAPTATIONS

The adult program has been translated in to Spanish, and a close-captioned version for the hearing impaired also is available.

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## CONTACT INFORMATION

### ABOUT THE DEVELOPER:

Donald Gordon, Ph.D., is a child clinical psychologist and family therapist, and Emeritus Professor of Psychology at Ohio University. Dr. Gordon has developed other SAMHSA Model and Promising Programs for delinquency and substance abuse prevention (Parenting Wisely CD-ROM program and Home-Based Behavioral Systems Family Therapy). His 30 years of clinical practice, consulting with schools and juvenile and domestic relations courts, as well as his courtroom and legislative testimony, have informed the programs he developed.

Jack Arbuthnot, Ph.D., is a developmental and social psychologist, a divorce mediator, and also is Emeritus Professor of Psychology at Ohio University. He has consulted with juvenile and domestic relations courts, testified in State legislatures, and provided training, along with Dr. Gordon, for domestic relations judges.

### FOR INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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Phone: (740) 593-9505

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Ashland, OR 97520  
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Web sites: [www.divorce-education.com](http://www.divorce-education.com)